MONATLICHER INFORMATIONSBRIEF ÜBER EVANGELISATION

A MONTHLY LETTER ABOUT EVANGELISM

LETTRE MENSUELLE SUR L'ÉVANGÉLISATION

Number 6

June 1958

The following paragraphs were written by a group who are working in New York City. These pages speak for themselves: they describe one of the most difficult concrete situations which the church faces, and thus shed a light upon all of the situations to which the Gospel must be preached.

THE PROBLEM OF NARCOTICS ADDICTION

Some doctors have said that the innocuous looking white powder called heroin is in fact less injurious to the body than many tranquillizers. The difference is that heroin is addicting and it is illegal to buy, sell, or possess it. Today it is the narcotic drug most commonly used by addicts in the world of music and entertainment and among the people of the lower income areas of the great American cities across the country. Addicted doctors usually use morphine. Like morphine, heroin is derived from the opium poppy. Sometimes it is taken through the nose, like snuff; more often it is injected into the skin or into the veins of the forearm. The resulting "high" has been compared with a religious experience by some, to a sexual orgasm by others. Within a few weeks of beginning to take it regularly a person becomes completely dependent upon it and is addicted. Like all narcotics, heroin is an effective pain-killer, easing the suffering of the body, and stilling the tumults of a troubled soul and mind. This ability to kill pain may well be the reason that it takes such permanent possession of a man's mind, body, and soul. Mankind long has sought release from the pains of this world. When Marx described religion as the opiate of the people, he knew the bitterness and sorrow of the poor who could not afford the excapes from life's pain afforded to the rich through alcohol and narcotics and through the myriad pleasures of sports, entertainment, social life, music and art. Ironically, heroin today has become an opiate of the poor who largely turn away from the churches.

REFERAT FÜR EVANGELISATION · STUDIENABTEILUNG · OEKUMENISCHER RAT DER KIRCHEN

DEPARTMENT ON EVANGELISM · DIVISION OF STUDIES · WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

DÉPARTEMENT D'ÉVANGÉLISATION · DIVISION DES ÉTUDES · CONSEIL ŒCUMÉNIQUE DES ÉGLISES

In an age of prospering churches, middle class America might ask itself if religion has become for some another one of life's opiate, turning the mind and soul from the pain and suffering of life in an unrealistic way.

At the center of the Christian faith stands a cross with a naked man hanging on it. However interpreted, Jesus' cry, "My God, my God, why hast though forsaken me?" is understood with quick burning sympathy by those who are in misery and despair. Jesus faced and passed through the greatest pain inflicted upon him. Few care to follow him. Rather than endure suffering, men have always found ways to ease their pain. Narcotics and pseudo-religion are two excellent pain-killers and escapes from reality.

Because of the presence of heroin in our midst, the members of the East Harlem Protestant Parish are daily touched to the heart by the insidious power of narcotics over the lives of people. A few days ago a sixteen year old boy who attends one of our churches went into a mysterious coma in his own house. Friends who knew his problem rushed him to the hospital just in time for doctors to give him an injection of nalline. In another few minutes he would have died from an overdose of heroin. He had been using it for only a few months. There are men of twenty-six in our neighbourhood who have been addicted for ten years - -ten years wasted in the persuit of a white powder which costs them from seven to twenty dollars a day, most of which is obtained illegally. What starts out as a teen-age adventure becomes the frenzied search for more and more of a narcotic which kills the pain of living for a few hours at a time. For most, death alone is release from this endless quest, for almost no addicts are cured.

In the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Christ, the Christian church claims to have the answer to life's riddles. Jesus chose to set his face toward Jerusalem and to walk toward certain suffering and death. This he did only because he knew that he was doing God's will. The Church of today is the custodian of this legacy. Each church in its own situation is obliged to face pain, not to avoid it. Often it ignores this obligation. Heroin addiction is only one of the tragedies in the lives of the people of East Harlem. The reasons why we as a Parish have chosen to devote special amounts of time, money, and personnel to facing the drug problem are varied. The love of our friends and neighbours who are afflicted by addiction is the first. Because of this natural feeling, our narcotics program has come into being almost unintentionally. It has simply grown.

A second reason has gathered force for us over the years. Heroin addiction as an answer to the eternal problem of suffering is effective - diabolically effective. A man sells his soul to the devil in powder form. An alternative answer is that of Jesus Christ. Squirm though they may, Christians cannot rid themselves of the duty to "preach deliverance to the captive and recovering of sight to the blind."

A third reason has also become clear. Addiction in our type of neighbourhood is above all a clearly visible symptom of a deep-rooted social disease. As a Christian church we have to help build a healthy community at

the same time that we are working with individuals. Scientific studies by such groups as the New York University Center for Human Research confirm our own observations that 1) addiction is high in low income areas. 2)Minority groups have only recently begun to have a disproportionately large number of addicts. 3) Juvenile addiction is only one manifestation of the adolescent malaise in our inner city areas and cannot be viewed apart from the entire problem of delinquency. Since these facts are so, the East Harlem Protestant Parish is in fact attacking addiction only insofar as it is helping to build a better neighbourhood, city, and nation. A frontal assault on heroin itself is not enough. Many addicted men, women, and youth are particularly intelligent and sensitive. Their very gifts have made them see the injustice of the prejudice, discrimination, and lack of opportunity in their lives. It is the belief of our Parish that many people of this calibre have quite unconciously rebelled against society and expressed their hatred by throwing themselves into the state of walking death known as addiction. It is our purpose not only to save these men and women from their habit, but to enlist their talents in our common fight under God to built a Christian community here in East Harlem where addiction and like manifestations of social disease will be impossible. We do not want to oversimplify a complex problem the causes of which no one knows, but we as a Christian community have felt a particular obligation to expand our work with narcotics addiction for these three reasons at least.

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The Monthly Letter about Evangelism, as is our custom, will not appear during the summer months, but will be resumed in the autumn. This gives us an occasion to report on some of the matters with which the Department on Evangelism has been concerned.

The Monthly Letter

We cordially invite our readers to contribute Monthly Letters. Many people around the world have expressed great interest in the accounts of evangelistic work which have appeared in the Letters. We need more of these, and we will welcome the story of the evangelistic work which you are doing.

Theology for Evangelism

If one asks a group of Christians certain questions about evangelism, one receives confusing replies. If, for instance, you ask: "If faith is awakened by the grace of God, why evangelise?", or if you ask "Why is it urgent to evangelise?" or if you ask, "Why, in final analysis, should a non-believer believe in God and Christ", the answers which are returned are far from clear. That is why the Department has undertaken a study on certain Biblical and theological matters which have to do with the very basis of the evangelistic task. The first stage of this inquiry is complete, and is con-

tained in a substantial document entitled "Theology for Evangelism". This may be secured from the Department upon request. Price: Sw.Frs.-.50

Pamphlet Series

The Pamphlet Series, being published by the Lutterworth Press, London, now contains the following titles:

EVANGELISM IN GERMANY
EVANGELISM IN THE UNITED STATES
EVANGELISM IN LATIN AMERICA
RESURGENT RELIGIONS

available at the price of Sw.Frs.1.20 each. In addition the following surveys are available:

EVANGELISM IN INDIA	Sw.Frs.-.80
EVANGELISM IN FRANCE	Sw.Frs.1.20
EVANGELISM IN SCOTLAND	Sw.Frs.1.20

"The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men".

There is no doubt that one of the weakest points in the evangelistic work of the Church, concerns its message to people of the non-Christian religions. How should Christians think of this problem? Is it a question of various great religions, Christianity included, which somehow must find a relationship to each other? Is Jesus Christ in fact unique, and if so what does that mean for His work among Hindus, and Moslems and Buddhists, and for the work of His Church among these people? These questions in turn raise others on which there is little or no clarity in the Church. The study on "The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men" is seeking to stimulate people in the churches to find proper answers to these issues. A first study document dealing with some of these problems is available, and may be secured upon request.